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U. S. Department of Agriculture

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Housekeepers' Chat

Monday, February 11, 1929.

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

Subject: "Hatching and Brooding Chicks." Information from Bureau of Animal Industry, U. S. D. A.

Bulletins available: "Incubation and Brooding of Chicks," "Poultry Keeping in Back Yards."

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I had a letter from my brother the other day. "Better come back to the old home town this spring," he writes. "We're going to plant garden before many weeks, and set the hens. Do you remember Biddy, the hen that caused you so much grief when you were a little girl?"

I certainly do remember Biddy. She was my special pet, a short-legged, stubby, pugnacious, little hen, who brought up many a family of chicks in her day. She decided one time that she wanted early spring vegetables for her chicks -- nothing else would do. Every morning, for several days, she tore loose from her moorings (I kept her tied to a tree), took her family of twelve, and started out to hunt for green vegetables.

As soon as she was missed, I was ordered to hunt her up. One day I found her in Old Man Robbins' lettuce patch, clucking excitedly. And who wouldn't have been excited? Old Man Robbins had lost his temper for fair.

"You old flutterbudget!" he was saying. "You short-legged bunch of pillow feathers! Git outa my garden before I wring your fool neck! Git!"

"Cluck, cluck!" said Biddy angrily.

"Stir your stumps!" commanded Old Man Robbins.

"Cluck-cluck-cluck!" said Biddy, meaning, "I won't take such rude language from any man!"

She gathered her flock about her and was preparing to eat lettuce for the rest of the day, just to show him, when he started after her with a rake. Then I rushed in and begged him to have mercy.

"I'll give you one more chance," said Old Man Robbins. "But if I have to chase that dum' hen outa my garden just one more time, young lady, off comes her head, and I'll settle with your dad."

For reasons well known to myself, I didn't care to have Old Man Robbins settle with my dad. I took Biddy home, and tied her to the elm tree, this time with an extra stout piece of cord!

But this isn't getting us anywhere. I asked a friend of mine in the Bureau of Animal Industry to give us some information about hatching and brooding chicks today -- information for women in small towns and suburbs, who find keeping a small flock of chickens both profitable and interesting. Our small flock of hens furnishes my family with fresh eggs throughout most of the year, besides providing us with occasional chicken dinners.

I wrote down a number of questions to ask my friend in the Bureau of Animal Industry, and I shall broadcast my questions and his answers.

First question: "What is the best way to secure chicks for backyard poultry keeping?"

Answer: Chicks may be secured by hatching under hens or in incubators, or they may be bought as day-old chicks. If you want only a few chickens, the use of natural methods of incubation and brooding may be used with very good results.

Second question: "How many eggs should be set under one hen?"

Answer: About 13 eggs should be set under one hen, the number depending on the size of the hen, and the season. The nest should be large enough -- about 18 inches square and 6 to 8 inches high. Place the nest where the hen will not be disturbed. A wire frame will cover the nest and keep the hen confined. Use straw or fine hay for the nest. It's a good idea to set a hen first on a glass egg, and then, after she becomes contented, put in the good eggs. Examine the nest daily and keep it clean.

Third question: "Hens get lice sometimes. What should they be treated with."

Answer: Sodium fluoride. Before the hen is set, she should be treated with sodium fluoride.

Fourth question: "How many times a day should a sitting hen be fed?"

Answer: Once a day. Hens should be fed scratch grains once a day, and given water to drink. Hens usually return to their nests after they have eaten. If they stay away more than half an hour put them back on the nests. It is advisable to set two hens at a time so that all the chicks may be brooded by one hen, in case of small hatches. As a rule the hen should not be disturbed while the chicks are hatching.

Fifth question: "Should the chicks be removed from the nest as soon as they are hatched?"

Answer: No. The chicks should be left in the nest for 24 hours after they are hatched, before the hen and chicks are removed to the brood coop. The brood coop should have a wooden floor. Roomy brood coops should be provided, together with a small wire run where the hen may be kept confined all of the time. Let the chicks have their freedom unless there is too much danger of loss from cats. If the hen is kept confined, the chicks will not wander very far away, and will do

very little harm to gardens or to flower beds. The coop should be kept clean and should be shut at night. Hens and chicks should be fed and cared for three times a day for the first week or two. If the chicks are kept confined to a small yard, they should be moved every few days, to a fresh plot.

Sixth question: "May incubators and brooders be used for small flocks?"

Answer: Yes. Incubators and brooders may be used for small flocks. Sometimes it's difficult to get setting hens early in the season; an incubator may be set at any time. When hens are used for incubations, the tendency is to hatch late chicks, which are much less profitable than early chicks. If an incubator is used, a brooder must be supplied for rearing the chickens. A brooder must also be used when day-old chicks are purchased. Many people who keep poultry in a very limited space find it best to buy pullets in the fall, for egg production, and not to either hatch or raise chicks.

Next question: "Is it all right to keep the incubator in the basement of a house?"

Answer: Yes. An incubator may be operated successfully in a house basement. Follow the manufacturer's directions in adjusting the temperature of the incubator. It should be operated at about 102 degrees for at least two days before the eggs are set. The eggs should be turned daily, from the second to the eighteenth day. The best incubator temperature is about 103 degrees.

Next question: "When should the eggs be tested?"

Answer: Test the eggs on the seventh day, and remove those which are infertile. Test again on the fourteenth day, and take out those that have dead germs. Do not open the incubator door after the eighteenth day, until the hatch is completed. When the chicks are through hatching, let them go down into the nursery tray, in the lower part of the incubator.

I asked my friend to answer only one more question; it is an important one: "Are there any bulletins which tell in a practical way, how to raise chicks, and how to keep chickens in back yards?"

"There are two bulletins," he told me, "which answer your questions. One is Incubation and Brooding of Chicks. The other is Poultry-Keeping in Back Yards. Both of these bulletins are free."

This concludes the list of questions and answers about hatching and brooding chicks. If you want to know more about the subject, I suggest that you send for these bulletins: Incubation and Brooding of Chicks, and Poultry-Keeping in Back Yards.

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Tomorrow I shall give you a menu and a brand new recipe.

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